Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Living on the Edge: CWCI Newsletter - Winter 2018

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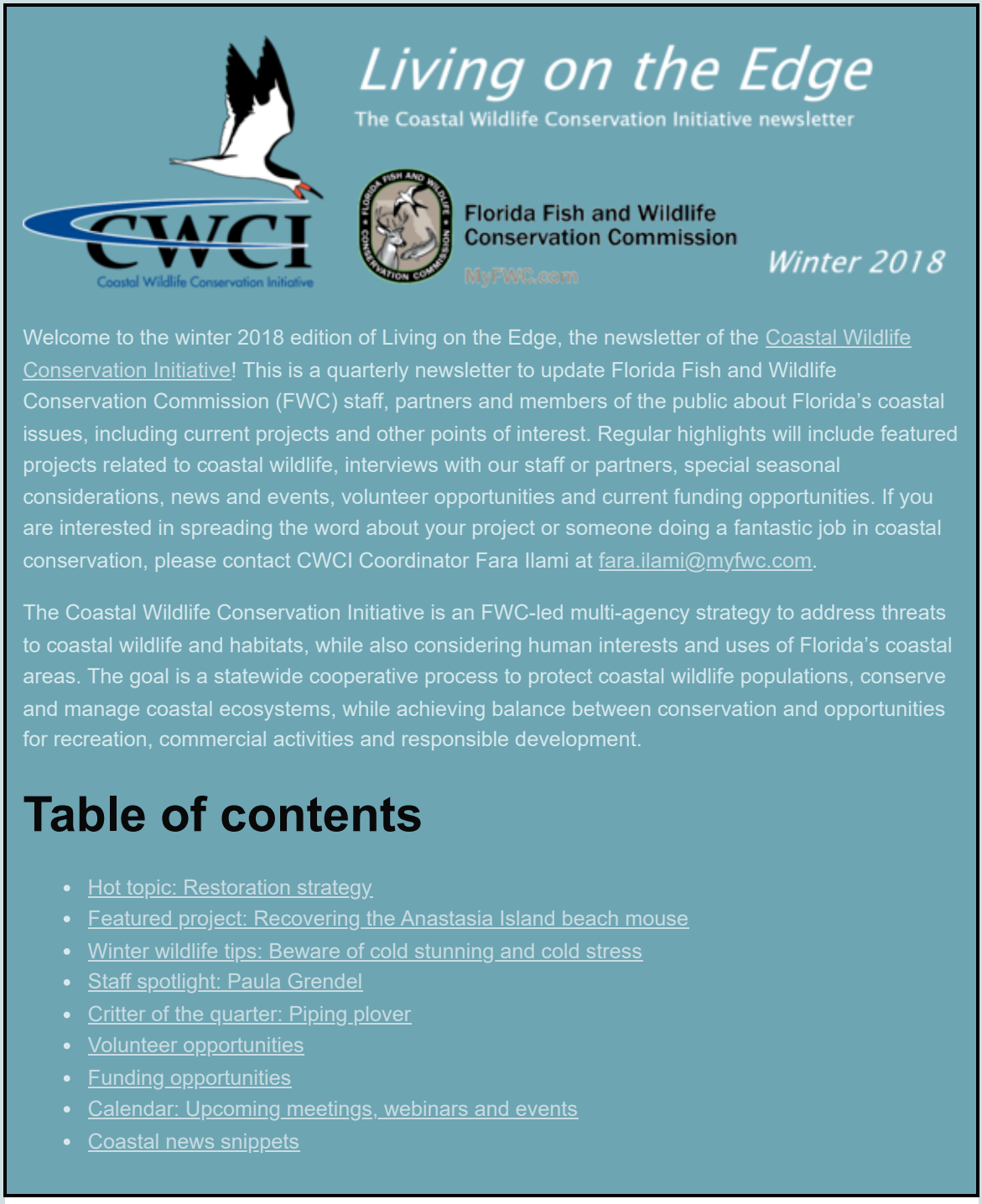

Welcome to the winter 2018 edition of Living on the Edge, the newsletter of the Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative! This is a quarterly newsletter to update Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff, partners and members of the public about Florida's coastal issues, including current projects and other points of interest. Regular highlights will include featured projects related to coastal wildlife, interviews with our staff or partners, special seasonal considerations, news and events, volunteer opportunities and current funding opportunities. If you are interested in spreading the word about your project or someone doing a fantastic job in coastal conservation, please contact CWCI Coordinator Fara Ilami at fara.ilami@myfwc.com.

The Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative is an FWC-led multi-agency strategy to address threats to coastal wildlife and habitats, while also considering human interests and uses of Florida's coastal areas. The goal is a statewide cooperative process to protect coastal wildlife populations, conserve and manage coastal ecosystems, while achieving balance between conservation and opportunities for recreation, commercial activities and responsible development.

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Hot topic: Restoration strategy

Since 2015, the FWC and Florida Department of Environmental Protection have received funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund to develop the Florida GEBF Restoration Strategy. The primary objective of the strategy is to provide a cohesive vision for planning the remaining GEBF investments in Florida of about $245 million that will address coastal restoration needs for the resources affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The three funding priorities include:

1. Restoring and maintaining the ecological functions of landscape-scale coastal habitats (Panhandle/Big Bend regions)
2. Restoring and maintaining the ecological integrity of priority coastal bays and estuaries (Panhandle/Big Bend regions)
3. Replenishing and protecting living resources (FL Gulf Coast)

It is anticipated that FWC and DEP will finalize and distribute the Strategy in late January 2018, followed by a public webinar in February 2018 to present the document and discuss the GEBF 2018 funding cycle.

For more information on GEBF funding in Florida, updates on the strategy or details on how to view and/or submit projects to the state project portal, please visit the DWH GEBF website. To receive updates and notifications on GEBF public engagement opportunities, please join our GEBF stakeholder email list by emailing the Assistant Gulf Restoration Coordinator at Amy.Raker@MyFWC.com.

Featured project: Recovering the Anastasia Island beach mouse

Photo Credit Anastasia State Park

In northeast Florida, beach mice populations suffered from damage to their habitat caused by Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. Historically, the Anastasia Island beach mouse, a federally endangered species that lives exclusively on coastal dune habitat, lived on nearly all of the St. Johns County coastline. But it is now found primarily at the north and south ends of Anastasia Island. The remaining populations occur in Anastasia State Park and Fort Matanzas National Monument, and potentially on county lands between the parks. After Hurricane Matthew, biologists estimated several hundred feet of the coastline had eroded, decimating portions of this critical beach mouse habitat.

The FWC is partnering with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the National Park Service, St. Johns County and the University of Florida on a project funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to aid in the recovery of the Anastasia Island beach mouse. The goal of this project is

to develop a recovery strategy over the next year for mouse populations on Anastasia Island severely impacted by Hurricane Matthew. This project will generate the needed information to help achieve USFWS recovery plan goals, such as maintaining viable beach mouse populations and improvement of its habitats, including connectivity.

Project Objectives:

1. Assess occupancy and relative abundance of the Anastasia Island beach mouse within the available beach mouse habitats on Anastasia State Park, Fort Matanzas National Monument and county lands to understand its population status.
2. Evaluate the current distribution and quality of beach mouse habitats, and identify the hurricane's impacts through assessment of pre-storm land cover data, in order to recommend a habitat restoration strategy.
3. Use project data to produce an Anastasia Island beach mouse restoration strategy consistent with the USFWS' beach mouse recovery plan, and recommend steps for effective habitat restoration and beach mouse recovery.

The project kicks off in January 2018, starting with monitoring of beach mouse populations through passive and active techniques that will continue throughout the year. Passive monitoring includes the use of track tubes and game cameras to detect presence of mice. Using track tubes is a low cost technique which entails a baited PVC tube, ink pad and paper. Mice that enter the tube leave behind only their footprints. Baited camera stations also are used to quickly confirm the presence of beach mice or other species in the area. This method is used to identify occupancy at target locations. Live trapping is an active technique that requires the use of baited live traps to safely capture mice and can be utilized to estimate relative abundance and document species presence.

For more information about this project, please contact Terry Doonan, Mammal Taxa Coordinator, Terry.Doonan@myfwc.com, or Emily Evans, Assistant Mammal Conservation Coordinator, Emily.Evans@myfwc.com, at the FWC's North Central Regional Office, (386) 758-0525.

Winter wildlife tips: Beware of cold stunning and cold stress

Some marine animals can experience negative impacts from the colder waters of winter. In sea turtles, the condition is known as "cold stun" and can render them inactive. They may become trapped in shallow coastal waters, pushed by strong winds or currents onto the shore or into marsh areas, or just float on the water's surface. Manatees may experience a condition known as "cold stress," which can result in death. They may succumb rapidly to hypothermia or experience longer lasting effects. External symptoms may include extreme weight loss, skin wounds, and feeding interruption.

What you can do:

- If you see a cold-stunned sea turtle or sick manatee, please contact the FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922) or #FWC or *FWC on a cell phone.
- Be careful when recreating or boating near manatee warm water refuges, as these areas are vital to their survival in times of cold weather. Do not scare or harass them, and follow all guidelines for viewing manatees.
- Consider donating to organizations that rescue cold-stunned sea turtles, either monetarily or by providing items desperately needed such as towels, kiddy pools, space heaters and medical supplies.
- To find out who may have local volunteer opportunities involving cold-stunned sea turtles, contact MarineTurtleVolunteers@MyFWC.com.
- Your purchase of a specialty "Save the Manatee" license plate directly supports manatee rescues and many other important manatee conservation efforts. Similar benefits occur when you purchase the "Helping Sea Turtles Survive" license plate.

Staff spotlight: Paula Grendel

1. **What is your title?** Northwest Regional Shorebird Biologist
2. **What organization do you work for?** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
3. **What type of work do you do?** I work in shorebird conservation dealing with planning, policy and on the ground restoration efforts with local, state, and federal natural resource management agencies.
4. **What project(s) have you recently been working on?** Two projects that I've recently been working on include: 1) Working with Gulf Island National Seashore as staff there create and address sand management protocols, ensuring the public can enjoy the natural resources of the park without impacting imperiled shorebird habitat. 2) Working with the FWC to develop direction for statewide adaptive predation management plans (strategies that adjust actions based on research and monitoring to minimize impacts of nest predation where there is significant loss) relative to shorebird conservation.
5. **How does your work relate to the CWCI?** The panhandle provides critical nesting, wintering and migratory stopover habitat for many species of shorebirds and seabirds. The natural beach areas that the shorebirds nest and forage on coincide with the same coastal areas that so many people come to Florida to enjoy. Understanding the shorebird ecology and the impacts that threaten their population allows us to implement practical management and policy decisions for our growing community of people.
6. **How long have you been working in the coastal environment, and what are some lessons you have learned?** I've been working in the coastal environment with a focus on

shorebird conservation for eight years. The biggest lesson that I've learned, both professionally and personally, is that we all, including scientists, wildlife managers, nonprofit organizations, government agencies and the public, must be involved in actions to improve matters surrounding conservation biology. It is our responsibility to give future generations the same opportunity to marvel at and benefit from nature as we have today.

7. **What do you think is the greatest threat to coastal ecosystems, and what action(s) should be undertaken to address it?** Habitat loss and degradation associated with coastal development poses serious threats to these invaluable beach ecosystems. The impacts of coastal development can be drastically reduced through effective planning and land use regulations.
8. **What is your favorite coastal animal, and why?** Oh boy, asking me my favorite of anything is incredibly difficult, especially if it is going to be about coastal animals. However, if I absolutely had to pick, I would choose the snowy plover. When on the beach, I keep my eyes peeled to get a sighting of this state-threatened bird and I naturally smile when I get a glimpse of one. If you are ever fortunate to watch a week-old chick – a little cotton puff ball on toothpicks - dancing up and down the sandy beaches, you too would claim them as your favorite coastal animal.
9. **Do you have a message you would like to share with readers of this newsletter?** We only have a fraction of the original coastline left that is not developed and if we continue to lose it, we may be faced with irreparable negative impacts on our currently declining shorebird populations. With today's technological advances, we have the capability to communicate with people all over the world. We can share ideas, discuss problems, work together and pressure leaders for change more effectively than any other generation. Let's take this opportunity to make positive change for the planet.

Critter of the quarter: Piping plover

A piping plover (top left) stands alongside a snowy plover (lower right) on a beach in Sarasota County, Florida. Both birds are in non-breeding plumage. (PC: M. van Deventer)

This winter's "Critter of the Quarter" is the piping plover (Charadrius melodus), a small, migratory shorebird that winters on Florida's Gulf and Atlantic coasts. Three populations of piping plovers are recognized: Northern Great Plains, Great Lakes and Atlantic. The Great Lakes population is federally designated as Endangered, while the Atlantic and Northern Great Plains populations are federally designated as Threatened. Individuals from all three populations have been identified as wintering on Florida's sandy beaches.

Piping plovers are small shorebirds, weighing less than 2 ounces (about 60 grams) and only 6 to 7 inches tall. They are similar in appearance to other plover species, such as the snowy plover and semipalmated plover (see Figure 1), but can be distinguished by their distinctly orange legs. They are in the family Charadriidae, whose members hunt by sight rather than by feel. Piping plovers use a run-and-pause behavior when foraging, and often "tremble" a foot over the surface as if to scare up prey. They feed on small crustaceans, insects, spiders and marine worms. Piping plovers have a high fidelity to their nesting and wintering grounds. Females lay an average of four eggs in a well-

camouflaged nest on the ground near foraging areas. Both the female and male adults share the egg incubation and chick-rearing responsibilities. Eggs hatch after 26 to 28 days of incubation, and the mobile, relatively mature chicks leave the nest within a few hours of hatching.

Threats to piping plovers include the loss, modification and degradation of nesting and foraging habitats -- primarily tidal flats, sandbars and beaches. Nest disturbance and predation also are problems for the species. You can help protect piping plovers in Florida by not chasing or flushing birds where they are resting and foraging at the beach. Respect areas of the beach that are posted as closed for the protection of wildlife, including shorebirds. If visiting a beach where dogs are allowed, always keep your dog leashed. Don't feed gulls or leave trash or food scraps behind on the beach, which can attract predators. Help keep beaches safe for piping plovers and other shorebirds!

Volunteer opportunities

Florida Shorebird Alliance – Volunteer to conduct bird surveys, monitor beach-nesting birds and roof-top nests, post sites, become a bird steward or simply join a local partnership.

Sea turtle organizations – Many organizations and individuals permitted by the FWC to conduct sea turtle conservation activities use volunteers. To find out who may have local volunteer opportunities involving sea turtles, contact MarineTurtleVolunteers@MyFWC.com.

Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program – Volunteer to empty a monofilament recycling bin at regular intervals at a location near you, or to help keep fishing line and marine debris out of the environment in other ways. For more information, contact Marine@myfwc.com.

Tampa Bay Watch Restoration – A variety of hands-on habitat restoration projects such as oyster dome construction, oyster shell bar installation, salt marsh plantings and coastal cleanups to help the bay recover from its devastating environmental problems. For more information, contact rarndt@tampabaywatch.org.

Funding opportunities

Captain Planet Foundation -- Educators, both K-12 classroom and informal, who are interested in receiving support for students to design and implement hands-on environmental solutions are eligible for project funding. Deadline is **January 15, 2018.**

Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program -- Submit **r**equests for proposals in four categories: restoration projects, science and innovative technologies projects, citizen engagement and education projects, and resilient coastal communities planning projects. Deadline for mandatory pre-proposal statement of intent is **January 19, 2018**.

NOAA Coastal Hypoxia Research Program (CHRP) -- Submit proposals to better understand the effects of hypoxia (depleted dissolved oxygen) on the nation's oceans, estuaries, coasts, Great Lakes ecosystems, ecosystem services and human communities. CHRP will support targeted laboratory and/or field studies, as well as development of quantitative predictive models or other relevant methods. The deadline is **January 30, 2018**.

NFWF Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program -- The program seeks to develop community capacity to sustain local natural resources for future generations by providing modest financial assistance to diverse local partnerships focused on improving water quality, watersheds and

the species and habitats they support. Projects include a variety of ecological improvements along with targeted community outreach, education and stewardship. The deadline is **January 31, 2018.**

Gulf Research Program Capacity Building Grants: Education **--** Grants to increase the scientific and environmental literacy and problem-solving skills of children and youth with a focus on service, projects or problem-based learning opportunities relevant to advancing the Healthy Ecosystems, Thriving Communities or Safer Offshore Energy Systems Initiatives of the Gulf Research Program. Deadline for Letter of Intent is **February 14, 2018**.

Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund -- Grants of up to $25,000 will be awarded in support of plant, animal and fungi species conservation efforts for endangered species, without discrimination on the basis of region or selected species. The deadlines are three times a year: **February 28**, June 30, and October 31.

NOAA National Sea Grant College Program 2018 Ocean, Coastal and Great Lakes National Aquaculture Initiative -- Grant proposals should relate to aquaculture research, tech transfer, best practices and increased production, and address constraints and barriers to domestic shellfish production. The deadline is **March 30, 2018**.

Alcoa Foundation Grant Program -- Sustainability is a major focus promoting 1) the prevention of and resilience to climate change and 2) the restoration and preservation of biodiversity. Grants are awarded on a rolling basis.

BoatUS Foundation Grassroots Grants Program **--** Provides grants up to $10,000 to nonprofit organizations, boating clubs and student groups for projects that promote safe and/or clean boating. Applications are accepted year round.

David & Lucile Packard Foundation **--** Grants are made for charitable, educational or scientific purposes, primarily from tax-exempt charitable organizations. Grants fall under several categories including climate, ocean, land, science, and conservation.

George & Miriam Martin Foundation Grants -- The focus of the foundation is river and watershed conservation. Grants range from $1,000 - $200,000. There are no deadlines.

Rockefeller Family Fund — Grant-making currently has an environment program focus on the challenges of climate change with an emphasis on public education. Letters of inquiry may be submitted at any time.

Surdna Foundation Grantmaking **–** Grant-making to nonprofit organizations in the priority areas of Sustainable Environments, Strong Local Economies and Thriving Cultures. Letters of inquiry may be submitted at any time.

Waitt Foundation Rapid Ocean Conservation (ROC) Grants -- This opportunity provides small grants with a quick turnaround time for solutions to emerging conservation issues. The funding cycle is open to new applications. Proposals are reviewed monthly on a rolling basis, although some applications take additional time to evaluate.

Wells Fargo Environmental Grant Program -- Environmental grant program focuses on addressing local environmental priorities in communities and providing support that fosters innovation to help accelerate a “green” economy. One letter of inquiry per year per organization is accepted.

Calendar: Upcoming meetings, webinars and events

OneNOAA Science Seminars, various dates and locations

Animal Telemetry Network Workshop, January 23-24, 2018, New Orleans, LA

Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill & Ecosystem Science Conference, February 5-8, 2018, New Orleans, LA

Ocean Sciences Meeting, February 11-16, 2018, Portland, OR

American Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting, February 15-19, 2018, Austin, TX

Adaptation Planning for Coastal Communities workshop, February 27-28, 2018, Naples, FL

Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance, March 16-18, St. Petersburg, FL

Coastal news snippets

New study looks at ecological “tipping points” for coastal species to help manage for change

Florida manatees on the move, public stewardship on the water makes a difference, November 1, 2017

Gov. Scott & FWC: Green sea turtle nest numbers hit record, November 17, 2017

FWC approves new Critical Wildlife Area in Volusia County, December 6, 2017

FWC discusses regional bay scallop seasons, December 7, 2017

FWC charges 3 in connection to shark dragging video, December 13, 2017

FWC monitoring sea turtles, manatees during cold weather, January 3, 2018

St. Johns River blue crab trap closure starts Jan. 16, January 5, 2018

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